DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 238 CG 018 339

AUTHOR Hartman, E. Alan; Perlman, Baron
TITLE Career Plateaus of Public Sector Managers.
PUB DATE 25 Aug 84
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (92nd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 24-28, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Characteristics; *Administrators; Careers; Mental Health Programs; *Occupational Mobility; Psychological Patterns; *Tenure
IDENTIFIERS *Career Plateaus

ABSTRACT

It is important that research on plateaued managers differentiate psychological and tenure plateauing. A study was conducted which employed the combination of a psychological variable and tenure on the job to define plateaued and nonplateaued managers. It was proposed that being plateaued implies not only being in a job for a long time, but also perceiving that few opportunities exist in the organization. This two-component definition of plateaued was used to identify four groups of managers: (1) those psychologically and organizationally plateaued; (2) those psychologically plateaued but not organizationally identified as plateaued; (3) those organizationally identified as plateaued but not psychologically plateaued; and (4) those neither psychologically nor organizationally plateaued. Managers from 109 mental health agencies provided data on psychological climate, personality, work history, work and nonwork satisfaction, and career decision making. The results indicated that being psychologically plateaued had a greater effect on several variables. Psychologically plateaued managers were alienated from both work and the community and were found to be more sensitive than their non-plateaued counterparts to role variables. (Author/NRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED259238

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Career Plateaus of Public Sector Managers

E. Alan Hartman
Psychology Department
College of Business Administration

Baron Perlman
Psychology Department

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI 54901

Paper presented at the 1984 Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, August 25, 1984, Toronto Canada.

CG 018339

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

E. Alan Hartman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

A two component definition of "plateaued" was used to identify four groups of managers: 1) those psychologically and organizationally plateaued, 2) those psychologically plateaued but not organizationally identified as plateaued, 3) those organizationally identified as plateaued but not psychologically plateaued, and 4) those neither psychologically nor organizationally plateaued. Managers from 109 organizations provided data on: 1) psychological climate, 2) personality, 3) work history, 4) work and nonwork satisfaction, and 5) career decision making. Results indicated that being psychologically plateaued had a greater effect on a variety of variables. Psycholgically plateaued managers were alienated not only from work but also from the community. In addition, those psychologically plateaued were more sensitive than their non-plateaued counteparts to role variables.

Career Plateaus of Public Sector Managers

Few studies of plateaued managers have been conducted. Veiga (1981) studied private sector medium size organizations. The current study explored the plateaued manager phenomenon within 109 small (average of 59 employees) public sector organizations.

Identification of plateaued managers using tenure in position is problematic. As society and organizations change their expectations regarding careers, what is considered a typical length of stay in a position changes, thus the definition of plateaued changes. For example, during the 1960's it was considered normal to remain in a single job for about two years. Today this time frame has increased as the baby boom managers move more slowly through organizations. Hence, the definition of a plateaued manager varies as expected time in position varies.

The second problem created by using time in position as a definition of plateauing is that the psychological aspects of being plateaued are ignored. Being plateaued implies not only a career ceiling, but also a perception on the part of the manager that this ceiling is undersirable, or that there are few options available.

To partially address these problems the present study employed the combination of a psychological variable and tenure on the job to define plateaued and non-plateaued managers. It is proposed that being plateaued implies, not only being in a job for a long time, but also perceiving that few, if any, opportunities exist in the organization. This study has three purposes: a) to ascertain the viability of a definition of plateauing which

includes both time in position and perception of available opportunities, b) to explore characteristics of plateaued and non-plateaued managers in smaller organizations, and c) to determine if the two groups of managers produce differential relationships between perceptions of organizational climate and work/nonwork satisfaction. As a result of these analyses it may be possible to identify different types of plateaued managers.

METHOD

Sample

Administrators in 109 mental health agencies participated in the study. Data were obtained through interviews (99% participating, n=314) and questionnaires (92% useable response rate, n=289). The sample was composed of organization directors and their immediate subordinates. The median budget for each organization was 1.3 million dollars. A majority of these organizations were in rural areas and the only mental health administrative job these managers could hold would be in their present organization.

Instrument

Data were collected on work and nonwork related variables. Data on work history, personal history, job satisfaction, nonwork satisfaction, importance of work and nonwork variables in career decision making, and psychological climate were obtained.

Work history information included number of past jobs, length of stay on each job and number of organizations for which the administrator had worked. Personal history data were marital status, sex, age, wage, number of children and education level.

Due to administrators' unique position in the community (i.e. they held the only job like it in the community), career decision making typically meant a conflict between remaining in the community and changing careers, or remaining in mental health administration and changing place of residence (conflict between work and nonwork considerations). For example, if the administrator wanted to change jobs but remain in mental health administration it was quite likely that he/she would have to move out of the present community. To address this problem the role of nonwork was studied from two perspectives. The first was an assessment of satisfaction with the community, much like an assessment of job satisfaction. This questionnaire contained 15 items and was factor analyzed resulting in 5 factors. These factors were satisfaction with: a) interpersonal relationships, b) cultural and leisure events, c) schools, d) community organizations, and e) taxes.

The second approach to addressing the role of nonwork was through a questionnaire assessing how important various aspects of work and nonwork were in considering taking another position. This questionnaire contained 21 items in eight general categories. A factor analysis resulted in the 8 categories being reproduced. These eight categories were: a) intrinsic work factors such as "utilize abilities", b) extrinsic work factors such as "pay", c) coworkers, d) family, e) leisure activities, f) values of community members, g) location, and h) community facilities. Psychological climate was measured through 14 climate clusters. These clusters included all those listed in Table 3 plus "role overload".

Procedure

All administrators were interviewed in their office. This interview required from one to four hours to complete. Upon completion of the interview a questionnaire was left for the administrator to complete.

Definition of Plateaued Managers

Plateaued managers were defined as: a) being in their position more than four years and b) a self report of few career opportunities within the organization. This self report was based on a single question asking degree of disagreement or agreement to the statement "there are many promotional opporutnities for individuals in this organization if they work for them". Time in position was dichotomized with long time in position being more than 4 years, and short time in position being less than 3 years. This was done to get relatively distinct groups. The median time in position was 2.5 years, therefore those in position greater than four years clearly exceeded the norm. "Opportunities" was also dichotomized by placing in the "many opportunities" group those who strongly agreed or agreed with the "opportunities" question. The "few opportunities" group was composed of all those who did not agree with the statement. These two dichotomized variables produced four groups of managers: a) long tenured and perceiving few career opportunities, b) long tenured and perceiving many career opportunities, c) short tenured and perceiving few opportunities, and d) short tenured and perceiving many career opportunities. By eliminating managers in the middle range (4 years in position) the sample was reduced to 225. Table 1 presents the number of managers within each group. As the table

displays, the largest group of managers perceived many opportunities and were short time in position. The smallest group would be called plateaued, few opporutnities and long time in position.

RESULTS

The four groups were compared on five major groups of variables: a) biographical, b) psychological climate, c) work and nonwork satisfaction, d) work and nonwork considerations in career decision making, and e) manifest needs. A 2 X 2 Multivariate Analysis of Variance was employed for these comparisons.

Biographical variables included: a) number of organizations in which managers had worked, b) age, c) salary, d) education level, e) sex and f) number of children. Two significant main effects were found, one for time in position ($F(6,216)=10.73$, $p < .001$) and one for perceptions of opportunities ($F(6,216)=2.94$, $p < .01$). Table 2 displays the means and univariate F ratios for variables which had significant univariate F ratios. Inspection of the discriminant function weights and the univariate F ratios indicated that age and salary were the primary contributing variables (greater salary and age were related to more hope and longer tenure).

MANOVA results for psychological climate variables indicated only one significant effect, a main effect for "perceived opportunities" ($F(14,238)=3.48$, $p < .001$). Table 3 presents the psychological climate variables which had significant univariate F ratios. All variables, with the exception of role overload, produced a significant effect for "Opportunities". The F ratios

and discriminant function weights indicated that "identificaton with the organization" and "fairness of the reward system" were the variables which produced the greatest differences between plateaued and non-plateaued managers.

While the two groups had many differences in perceptions of the organization, it was possible that reactions (i.e. satisfaction) to the environment would not differ. Satisfaction with work (intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction) and nonwork (interpersonal relationships, community organizations, schools, community facilities and leisure activities) were compared. There was not a significant interaction but there were significant main effects for "Opportunities" ($\underline{F}(7,246)= 2.97$, $\underline{p} < .005$) and "Tenure" ($\underline{F}(7,246)=3.39$, $\underline{p} < .01$). Table 4 presents variables whose univariate F ratios indicated significant differences for only one of the main effects. As the table shows, "extrinsic satisfaction" and "interpersonal relationships" produced significant differences for perceived opportunities. For "tenure", community facilities and schools produced significant effects. The interesting results indicated that "extrinsic satisfaction" and "interpersonal relationships" differentiated the "few opportunities" group from the "many opportunities" group. This is consistent with the findings for psychological climate in that "identification with the organization" was one of the primary variables differentiating the two groups. It may be that plateaued managers feel a sense of alienation from both community and organization.

Table 5 presents variables which had significant univariate main effects for both "Time" and "Opportunities". "Intrinsic job

satisfaction" and "community organizations" both differentiated the two groups. The results for "Tenure", however, were not consistent for the two satisfaction measures. Long tenured managers were more satisfied than short tenured managers with intrinsic aspects of the job, but were less satisfied than short tenured managers with community organizations. It may be that these individuals compensate for alienation on the job with activities outside the job.

Results for "Opportunities" show that managers perceiving many opportunities were more satisfied with both intrinsic components and community organizations. The most interesting point about these results is the apparent cumulative effect of the two component definition of plateaued. Those managers who were long time in position and few opportunites had the lowest job satisfaction, while short time managers with many opportunites had the greatest intrinsic satisfaction. Possibly they had not been in the community long enough to establish relationships with community organizations. The most satisfied were those who had long time in position and perceived many opportunities. They had established themselves, and were content with their position.

To explore the role of work and nonwork variables when considering another job, a two factor MANOVA was performed on the eight categories of work and nonwork considerations, only "Opportunities" produced a significant effect ($\underline{F}(8,239)=1.99$, $\underline{p} <.05$). Table 6 shows the means and univariate F ratios for variables which produced significant differences. The two variables were "Community Values" and "Coworkers". The "few opportunities" group rated both of these as less important. The

sense of alienation apparently does not result in greater need for coworkers.

The final MANOVA compared the four groups on needs for achievement, autonomy and power. There were no significant multivariate effects but there was one significant univariate F for "need for achievement". Those individuals perceiving few opportunities had a mean of 17.74 while those perceiving many had a mean of 18.65. It may be that those individuals with few opportunities began with a lower need for achievement or they may have acquired a low need for achievement due to a lack of opportunities.

In summary, managers with few career opportunities were alienated from work and community. Both time in position and perceived opportunities affect intrinsic satisfaction in an additive fashion. All climate variables, with the exception of role overload, were affected by perceived opportunities, with managers who perceived fewer opportunities having less favorable perceptions of climate. While this information is interesting, it is important to determine if relationships between climate variables and job satisfaction were moderated by the degree to which a manager is plateaued.

To determine the possible moderating effects of membership in one of the four groups, four sets of Pearson Product Moment correlatons were computed. Tables 7 and 8 present the correlations within the four groups for intrinsic satisfaction and extrinsic satisfaction respectfully. Tests for homogeneity of the four correlations for each Climate - Satisfaction combination were computed (Edwards, 1965). No significant differences were found

for extrinsic satisfaction. For intrinsic satisfaction, there were two significant effects, one for "challenge and variety of the job" and one for "role ambiguity". In the case of "challenge and variety", the two groups which could be viewed as psychologically plateaued (few opportunities despite time in position) had higher correlations than those not psychologically plateaued (those perceiving many opportunities with short time in position had the lowest correlation).

While two significant differences with 28 tests is not a striking finding, an inspection of Table 7 shows that the psychologically plateaued groups had higher correlations than those not psychologically plateaued. A second set of subgroup correlations were calculated for the psychologically plateaued and non-psychologically plateaued groups separately. These correlations are presented in Table 9. Of the 14 correlations for Intrinsic Satisfaction 12 correlations for the psychologically plateaued were higher than for those not psychologically plateaued. The average correlations were .37 for psychologically plateaued and .22 for those not psychologically plateaued. These means were not significantly different. Tests on differences between individual correlations supported the results for the four groups case, the psychologically plateaued had higher correlations between "intrinsic satisfaction" and "organizational clarity" ($t(275)=2.366$, $p < .01$), "challenge and variety" ($t(275)=2.27$, $p < .01$) and "role ambiguity" ($t(275)=3.08$, $p < .01$). Apparently individuals with few opportunities are more sensitive to role variables than are individuals who perceive many opportunities.

Discussion

The most striking result is the apparent alienation of managers perceiving few opportunities in the organization. They had significantly lower identification with the organization and were less satisfied with both instrinsic and extrinsic job factors. In fact, the group with the lowest job satisfaction was the group with long tenure and few opportunities. Short tenure apparently has a reverse effect for nonwork satifaction, with the shorter tenured individuals having less satisfaction with nonwork but more satisfaction with work. The managers appear to be compensating in nonwork for their lower work satisfaction. Past research on the relationship of work to nowork has employed moderating variables such as type of job and group performance. These variables have indicated a moderating effect with compensatory behavior more likely in blue collar or low performing groups, while spillover appeared in white collar and high performing groups. The present study appears to support compensatory behavior for plateaued managers and spillover for nonplateaued managers.

The results indicated significant overall effects on psychological climate. All climate clusters, except role overload, were significantly lower for psychologically (few opportunities) plateaued managers. The importance of work and nonwork considerations for taking another job produced an overall significant F for "Opportunities" while satisfaction with work and nonwork produced significant main effects for both "Tenure" and "Opportunities". The results support the use of both time in position and perception of organizational job opportunites in the

definition of plateaued managers. Also, both these variables had significant effects on perceptions and affective responses to work and nonwork environments, and produced differences on relative importance of work and nonwork in work related decision making.

The correlations between climate and satisfaction showed that psychologically plateaued (few opportunities regardless of time in position) were more sensitive to role variables. If role ambiguity was present, or challenge and variety were absent, psychologically plateaued managers were much more likely to have lower satisfaction with work than were non-plateaued managers. For non-plateaued managers the climate of the organization appears to be less important than for psychologically plateaued managers.

Based on the results of this study, when one researches plateauing it is important to differentiate psychological and tenure plateauing. Both aspects of palteauing play a role in perceptions, career decision making and satisfaction with the environment.

Reference

Veiga, J. F. 1981. Plateaued versus nonplateaued managers: Career patterns, attitudes and path potential. Academy of Management Journal, 24:566-578.

Table 1

Number of Managers in Each Group

	Time in Position	
Opportunities	< 2 years	> 4 years
Few	71	38
Many	92	54

Table 2

Means and F Ratios for Selected Biographical Variables For Both Tenure and Opportunity

		Opportunities	
Variable	F(1,221)	Few	Many
Age	8.20	3.93	4.50
Salary	12.84	2.94	3.60

		Tenure	
Variable	F(1,221)	Short	Long
Age	40.59	3.80	5.04
Salary	30.77	2.94	3.96

Table 3

Means and F Ratios for Psychological Climate Variables

		Opportunities	
Variable	F(1,251)	Few	Many
Board Conflict	12.93	10.96	9.35
Board Performance	7.13	8.50	9.15
Organizational Clarity	5.31	16.90	17.82
Performance Appraisal Process	12.72	12.72	13.76
Fairness of the Reward System	26.22	7.52	9.05
Work Group Cooperation	15.30	26.17	28.08
Job Challenge and Variety	14.67	14.65	15.86
Job Autonomy	15.03	19.65	21.04
Role Ambiguity	9.78	7.08	6.14
Role Conflict	15.63	7.49	6.43
Job Identification	7.04	8.28	8.62
Occupation Identification	20.71	15.46	17.50
Organization Identification	35.23	15.22	17.65

Table 4

Means and F Ratios for Work and Nonwork Satisfaction Variables Which Had Only One Significant Main Effect

		Opportunities	
Variable	F(1.246)	Few	Many
Extrinsic Job Satisfaction	9.91	19.74	21.51
Interpersonal Relationships	8.89	-.20	.12

		Tenure	
Variable	F(1,246)	Short	Long
Cultural and Leisure Facilities	8.56	-.09	.21
Schools	7.61	-.12	.16

Table 5

Means for Work and Nonwork Satisfaction Variables Which had signficant Main Effects for Both Tenure and Opportunities

		Opportunities		
Variable	Tenure	Few	Many	
Intrinsic	Short	49.14	51.34	50.39
Satisfaction	Long	47.05	49.77	48.67
		48.43	50.77	

		Few	Many	
Community	Short	-.20	.02	-.07
Organizations	Long	-.05	.22	.11
		-.15	.09	

Table 6

Means and F Ratios for Significant Job Decision Considerations

		Opportunities	
Variable	F(1,246)	Few	Many
Community Values	6.71	5.10	5.53
Co Workers	6.00	10.56	10.95

Table 7

Subgroup Correlations of Climate with Intrinsic Satisfaction

	Opportunities			
	Few		Many	
Tenure	Long	Short	Long	Short
Board Conflict	-31	-22		
Board Performance		30		
Organizational Clarity	27	47		24
Performance Appraisal		23		
Fairness of Reward System	42		30	22
Work Group Cooperation	32	51		22
Job Challenge and Variety	49	56	38	20
Job Autonomy	34	44	47	37
Role Ambiguity	-66	-49	-24	-30
Role Conflict	-46	-42	-29	-26
Role Overload				-21
Job Identification		27	30	
Occupation Identification	56	40	36	35
Organization Identification	48	39	40	19

Table 8

Subgroup Correlations of Climate with Extrinsic Satisfaction

	Opportunities			
	Few		Many	
Tenure	Long	Short	Long	Short
Board Conflict	-52	-42	-46	-26
Board Performance		48	32	39
Organizational Clarity	47	52	41	49
Performance Appraisal	37	46	29	29
Fairness of Reward System	59	51	48	49
Work Group Cooperation	35	45		36
Job Challenge and Variety	31	47	42	24
Job Autonomy	42	28	43	33
Role Ambiguity	-66	-45	-53	-58
Role Conflict	-55	-46	-52	-32
Role Overload	-34			-20
Job Identification			39	
Occupation Identification	41	55	41	58
Organization Identification	57	66	67	59

Table 9

Opportunities Subgroup Correlations

	Intrinsic		Extrinsic	
Opportunities	Few	Many	Few	Many
Board Conflict	-24	-12	-45	-32
Board Performance	13	15	34	36
Organizational Clarity	22	12	44	29
Performance Appraisal	39	12	48	46
Fairness of Reward System	25	22	54	46
Work Group Cooperation	43	21	41	29
Job Challenge and Variety	51	28	40	29
Job Autonomy	40	42	32	37
Role Ambiguity	-57	-26	-55	-55
Role Conflict	-45	-26	-51	-39
Role Overload	-17	-14	-21	-21
Job Identification	26	20	17	11
Occupation Identification	45	35	48	50
Organization Identification	43	26	63	60